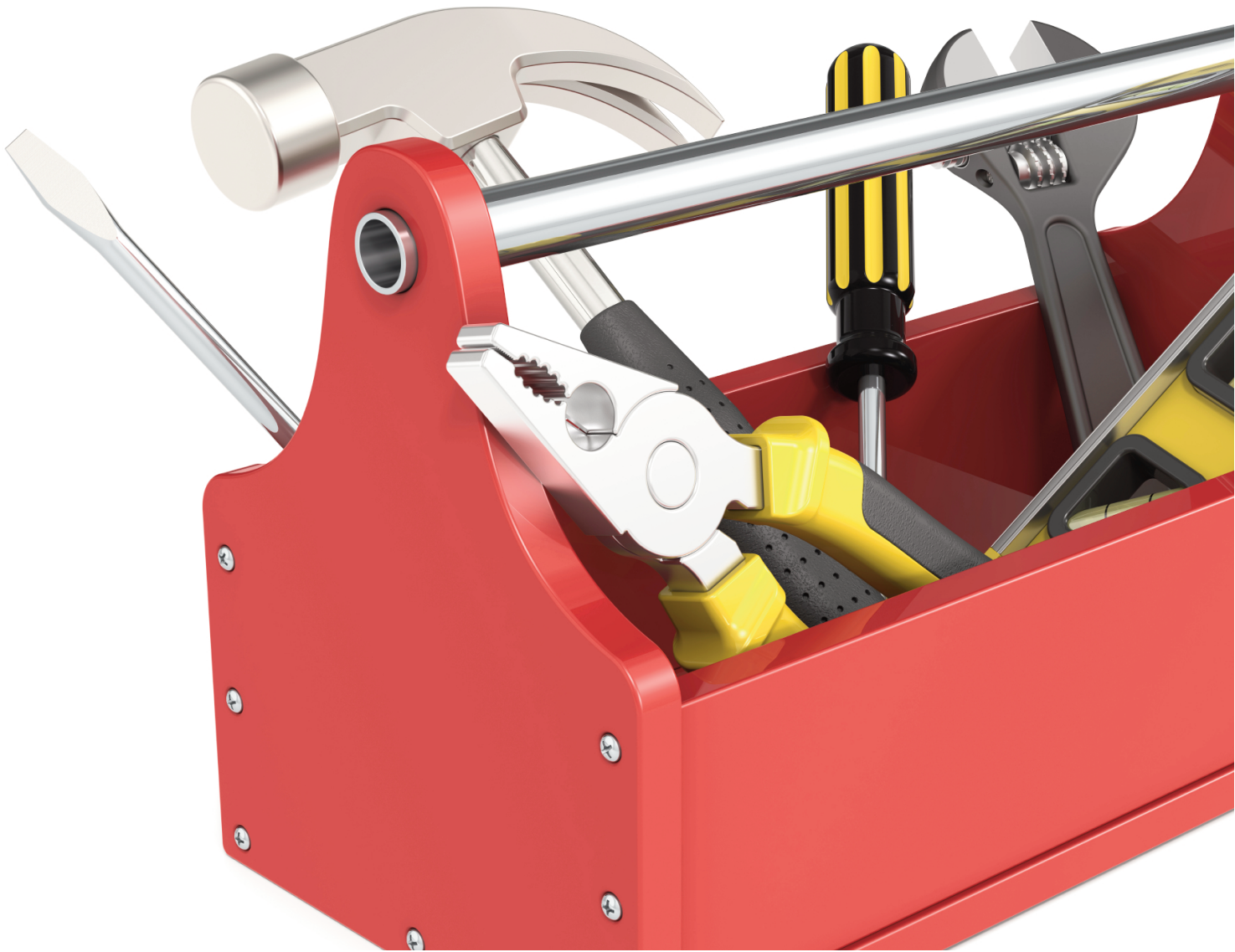


The Hiring Manager's Toolbox:

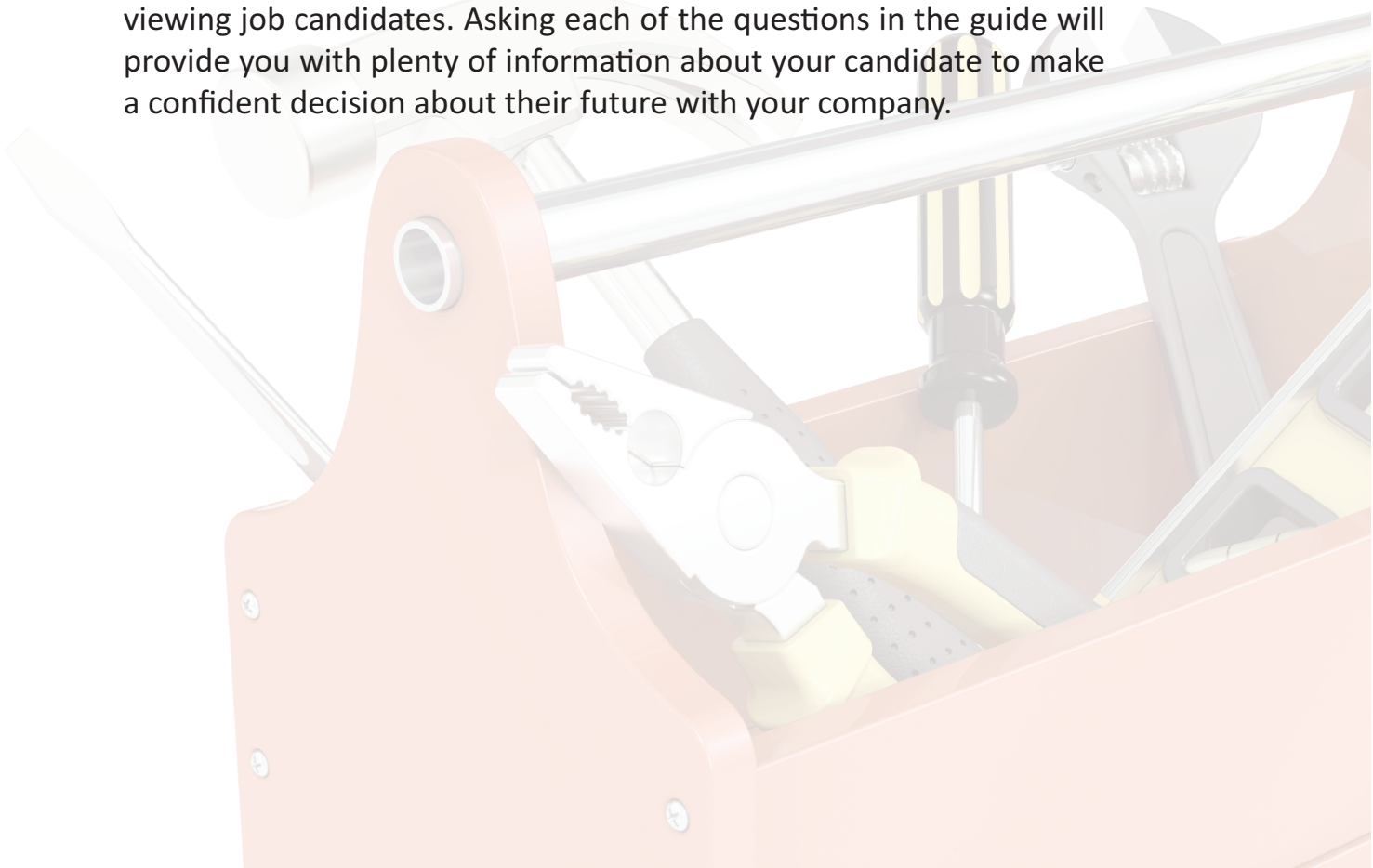
# 22 Surefire Interview Questions



## The Hiring Manager's Toolbox: **22 Surefire Interview Questions**

Resumes and referrals can provide a great amount of valuable information about an applicant, but there is no substitute for meeting an individual in person. The interview process is your time to really get to know a candidate. Asking the right questions throughout the interview will give you a better sense of an individual's work experience and skill set, as well as their personality and ability to fit in at your company.

The following questions can serve as a guide as you prepare for interviewing job candidates. Asking each of the questions in the guide will provide you with plenty of information about your candidate to make a confident decision about their future with your company.



## Getting Warmed Up

Introductions and warm up questions will help both you and your candidate to feel more comfortable throughout the interview. Start with a simple icebreaker. Ask about the weather or where the individual was traveling from. Some basic small talk will let your candidate know that you intend for this interview to be a conversation, rather than a stressful situation.

**Tip:** *Don't play the intimidation game.*

Some interviewers choose to intimidate potential employees when asking questions. While this is often meant to determine how an individual will deal with stressful situations, it simply isn't an effective interview tool. Instead, build rapport and ease into the tougher, more in-depth questions. This conversation will set the tone for the rest of your time together.

**Question #1:** Do you have any experience with our company? Or, how did you hear about us?

**What You'll Learn:** These icebreakers are an opportunity to learn a bit about the applicant. They will have the chance to share any connection they have to the company and offer some information about themselves, without feeling the need to divulge many personal details right off the bat. This is also a chance to find out if the applicant has done any homework to learn about the company.

## Verifying Experience and Knowledge

A good segue into the bulk of the interview involves asking about previous work experience. In this portion of the interview, you'll want to find out more about where the candidate has worked previously, what they were doing at that job, and why they left.

**Question #2:** If I were to contact your previous supervisor, how would he/she describe your work performance?

**What You'll Learn:** This is a spin on a more generic question that is usually asked in an interview. Rather than asking for your candidate's opinion of their performance, this question will cause them to give some thoughtful consideration to how others view them in a work environment. Mentioning a previous boss will also keep an applicant on track, reminding them that you can make a phone call to verify information, if necessary.

**Question #3:** Why have you had \_\_\_ jobs in \_\_\_ years?

**What You'll Learn:** This question could be asked for two reasons. If the applicant has had many jobs in a short period of time, you'll want to find out what has caused the jumping around. The applicant should take the job seriously, rather than looking at it as a temporary gig while looking for other options. On the other hand, a candidate may have been at the same job for many years. In this case, it may be worth asking what has caused the desire to leave that steady job for this new opportunity.

**Question #4:** Why did you leave you most recent job?

**What You'll Learn:** Some individuals may choose to be vague with this answer while others may go into detail. It can be very helpful to find out whether the candidate left the job in hopes of advancing their career or if the job was terminated as the result of issues in the workplace.



## Verifying Skills for the Job

In addition to asking about previous work experience, you'll also want to find out about the specific skills that will be necessary for the position. While a resume may be filled with lists of accomplishments and awards, they are nothing more than words until an applicant can show you how those skills can be used to help your company meet its goals.

**Tip:** *Ask for specifics to avoid potential future headaches.*

While most of us would like to think that people will be honest, some applicants may feel pressured to embellish their talent in an effort to get ahead. Asking the right questions will help to ensure that you'll choose a candidate that will come in prepared to take on the designated tasks.

**Question #5:** What were your responsibilities at your previous job?

**What You'll Learn:** It can be easy to create a long list of buzzwords under an impressive title on a resume. However, asking for the specifics of previous job responsibilities will help to get a better sense of what an individual actually did from day to day. If you feel that the applicant is exaggerating their skills, ask for clarification. Have them explain tasks and give examples of their duties.

**Question #6:** Can you tell me about your top three proudest accomplishments that were achieved during your time at that job?

**What You'll Learn:** This isn't necessarily an opportunity for the applicant to brag about their achievements, but a time to share a real way in which they put their skills to use to help the company. This is an excellent indicator of the type of achievement you can expect from the candidate in the future. If there is hesitation or no solid answer to this question, the applicant may not be comfortable with their skill set or their ability to go above and beyond at work. Asking for three makes the candidate stretch—and the candidates who can give you three solid answers will stand out because they really know their stuff.

**Question #7:** Do you feel that your skill set was put to good use at your previous job?

**What You'll Learn:** Does this person have some hidden talents that you could put to good use? This is the time to find out. Let the candidate fill you in on where their strengths are and what they have to offer. This question will also give you some insight as to what tasks your applicant enjoys and excels at, as well as which tasks he or she feels are less important or less engaging.

**Question #8:** Create a situation to put their required skillset to the test. For example, if you're hiring for a sales position, you may ask, "If we were introducing a new product next month, what would be your plan for selling that product in an innovative way, while keeping efficiency up and costs down?"

**What You'll Learn:** The purpose of this question is to see how well your candidate thinks on his or her feet. It gives the candidate an opportunity to share ideas, strategies, and goal setting abilities. Do they value technology as a marketing tool? Will they mention working with a capable team? Is customer service a consideration? This question will offer information about your candidate's ability to work under pressure as well as where his or her priorities lie.

## Asking About Behavior and Customer Service

At this point in the interview, you will have most likely formed an opinion about the character of the person you are interviewing. You'll have an idea of their work ethic and whether they would be able to handle the demands of the job. Next, you'll want to find out how he or she might behave outside of the formal interview situation.

**Question #9:** In work situations, what causes you the most frustration?

**What You'll Learn:** This answer will be very telling. The candidate might admit to struggling with deadlines or answering to supervisors. There might be an issue with working as a part of a team. He or she may not handle conflict well. Asking this question is a good alternative to the standard "what is your biggest weakness?" question and will result in a much more honest answer.

**Question #10:** Think about a time when you had to deal with an upset customer/client. How did you handle the situation?

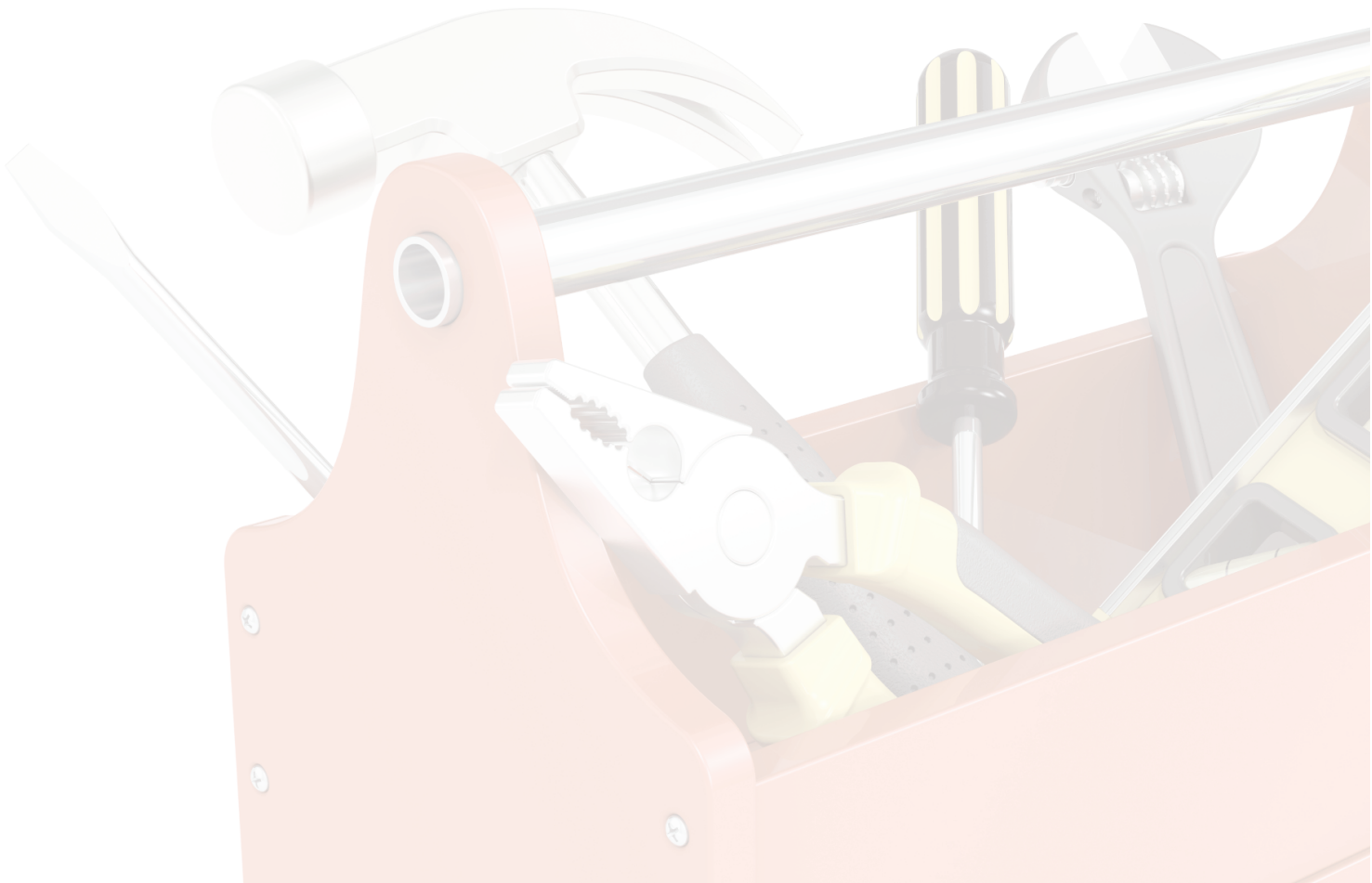
**What You'll Learn:** Clearly, this question is meant to discover how this individual responds to conflict. If this is a position that involves interaction with customers or clients on a regular basis, you'll want to choose someone that can remain level headed in stressful situations.

**Question #11:** Have you ever had a conflict with a coworker? How did you resolve that conflict?

**What You'll Learn:** Everybody will encounter a conflict, whether minor or more involved, with a coworker at some point. Handling a situation with a customer or client is a very different situation than working through a disagreement with a coworker whom you'll work with each day. This question will give a glimpse into the applicant's communication skills and ability to resolve conflict in a healthy way.

**Question #12:** Imagine that you are under a pressing deadline. At the end of the work day, your computer falters, causing you to lose all of the work you had been doing. How would you handle the situation?

**What You'll Learn:** There are a few things that you can learn from this question. First, you'll find out how the individual deals with stressful situations. As we all know, computer issues always seem to come up at the most inconvenient times and can be very frustrating. There are several ways that this problem could be handled. Second, you may learn about the individual's work ethic. Would they put off the work or stay late to find a solution? Finally, you will be able to recognize if the candidate has strong problem solving skills.





## Determining Cultural Fit

Every company has a unique culture. This culture is made up of everything from how coworkers interact throughout the day to how events are celebrated in the office. A healthy work environment will keep productivity high and employees in good spirits throughout the work day.

**Tip:** *Don't bring negativity into a positive work environment.*

It's no secret that one negative individual can lower the morale for the rest of the office. Interpersonal communication is a vital skill, especially for those who are interested in positions that require working with a team. Ask some questions to find out how your candidate manages the social aspect of working for a company.

**Question #13:** Describe an effective relationship between a manager and his employees.

**What You'll Learn:** This question isn't necessarily asking about a relationship that this individual has had with a manager, but will offer some information about the expectations he or she has for interactions with superiors. Another way to phrase the question would be to ask the applicant about the best boss they've ever worked for. This will show what type of work environment the individual thrives in, what personality types they mesh with, and how well they respond to those above them.

**Question #14:** Describe what role you typically play on a team.

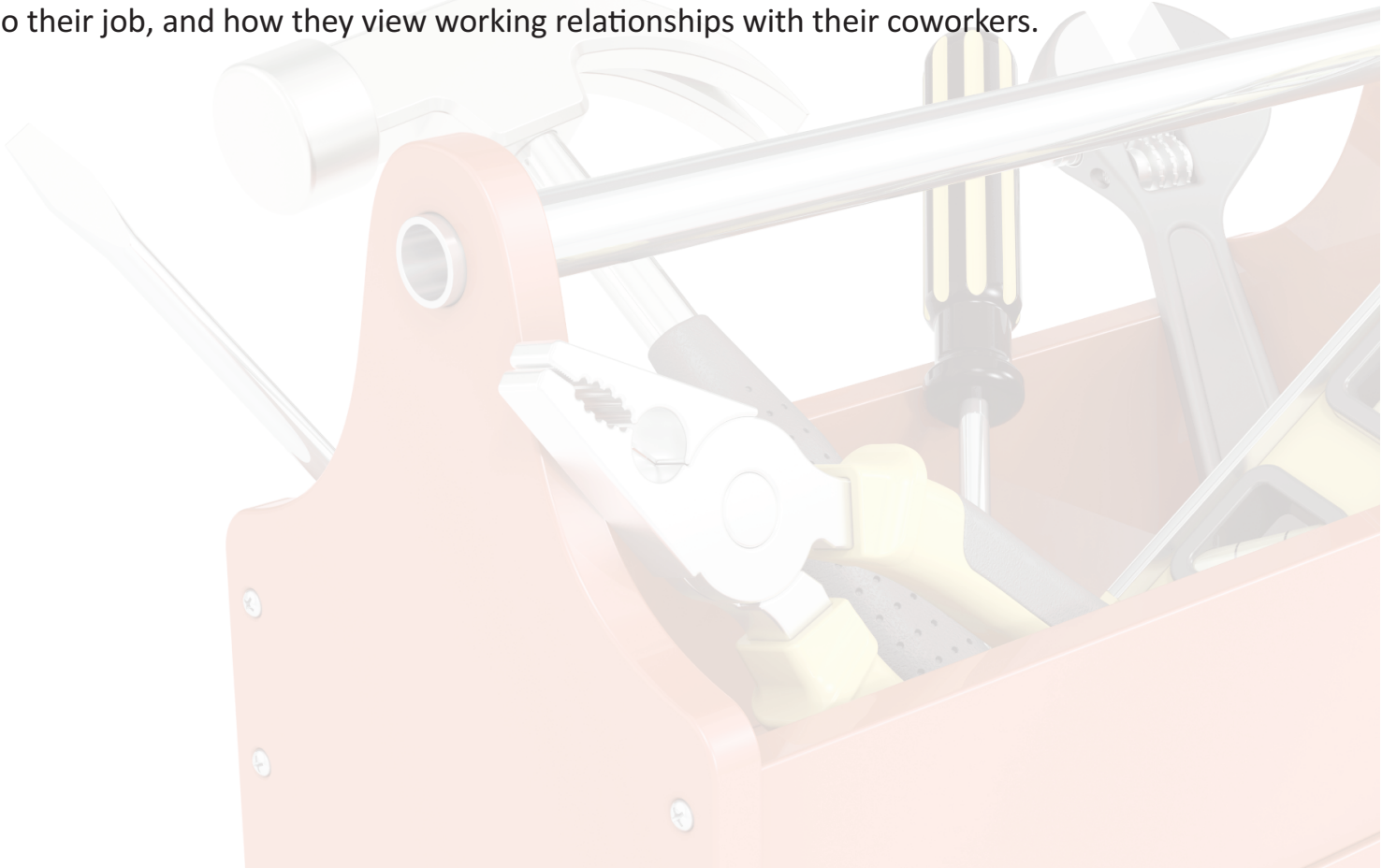
**What You'll Learn:** Interactions with coworkers are easiest to analyze when several people are working together as a part of a team. Some individuals will stand out as leaders while others will thrive when taking direction. Some will focus on the big picture while others will prove to be more detail oriented. Find out where your candidate will fit in with the rest of your staff.

**Question #15:** How would your coworkers describe working with you?

**What You'll Learn:** As with previous questions, this will require the interviewee to put themselves in someone else's shoes and really examine how they behave in a work environment. This is a chance for the applicant to highlight their strengths and let you know how they will add to the team. Look for a future employee that will be able to communicate effectively with others, work well with a team, and remain positive in stressful situations.

**Question #16:** Describe the ideal work environment where you feel you would be most happy and productive.

**What You'll Learn:** After determining how your candidate prefers to interact with others in the workplace, there will still be some elements of your workplace culture to address. Look to this question for information about your candidate's work ethic and expectations of the office environment. You may learn about the individual's level of professionalism, dedication to their job, and how they view working relationships with their coworkers.



## Determining Interest Level

Is this candidate here because they have a serious desire to work for your business? If a candidate is truly interested, they will most likely have done some homework to learn about the company, as well as the position.

**Tip:** *Finding the right fit for your position is a two way street.*

After asking questions to determine if the person you are interviewing is someone that you would like to work with, be sure that you are a company that they will be happy to work with. When you find yourself choosing between a few final candidates, these questions may very well be the deciding factor, as you'll find out which individual has the enthusiasm for the job.

**Question #17:** What do you think separates us from our competitors?

**What You'll Learn:** As a company, you always want to be one step ahead of your competitors. Find out if your candidate has an understanding of the ways that your employees are working to stay on top. This is your candidate's opportunity to share their passion for the company, a preference for the product, or their enthusiasm about building the brand.

**Question #18:** What makes you want to work for our company?

**What You'll Learn:** This question gets right to the point. A candidate's enthusiasm will shine through as they give an answer. Get a sense for their motivation in applying for the position. Let them explain what they know about your company, how they feel they would fit in to your business plan, and why they are excited to be a part of the team.

**Question #19:** Where do you see yourself in ten years?

**What You'll Learn:** This is a fairly standard interview question, but one that is used time and again for good reason. The answer to this question will let you know what goals and aspirations your candidate has for themselves. Look for the candidate who has clear goals and describes their future plans with confidence. An ambitious person will work hard to accomplish their goals and that ambition will, hopefully, carry over to fulfilling the goals of the company as well.

## Discussing Position Details

You may already know whether you've found a good candidate. You may also feel confident that they are interested in the position. What's left? Be sure to flush out the details of the position to ensure that you are both on the same page. This will save you from choosing a candidate and later being let down if he or she opted not to take the job because of a simple misunderstanding.

This is the time to discuss job requirements and responsibilities, as well as having the conversation about the position's salary. The candidate should have already taken the time to look over the job description. In case there is any confusion about the details of the position, open the floor for questions at this point.

**Question #20:** What are your salary requirements?

**What You'll Learn:** This question is straightforward, but can be tricky to answer. Salary is a very important detail to discuss before hiring, but some applicants may feel uncomfortable with bringing up salary on their own. By being straightforward with the question, you are opening up that conversation.

**Question #21:** What questions do you have for me?

**What You'll Learn:** First, you'll find out if the applicant actually took the time to learn about what the job entails. Second, the applicant can voice any concerns that he or she might have with the job responsibilities or with the company, in general. Finally, you can learn more about the applicant based on the questions that they ask at this point in the interview. Leave it open-ended, and see where the candidate takes you. If you see this individual as a strong candidate, you may choose to be more in depth with answers or offer additional information about the company.

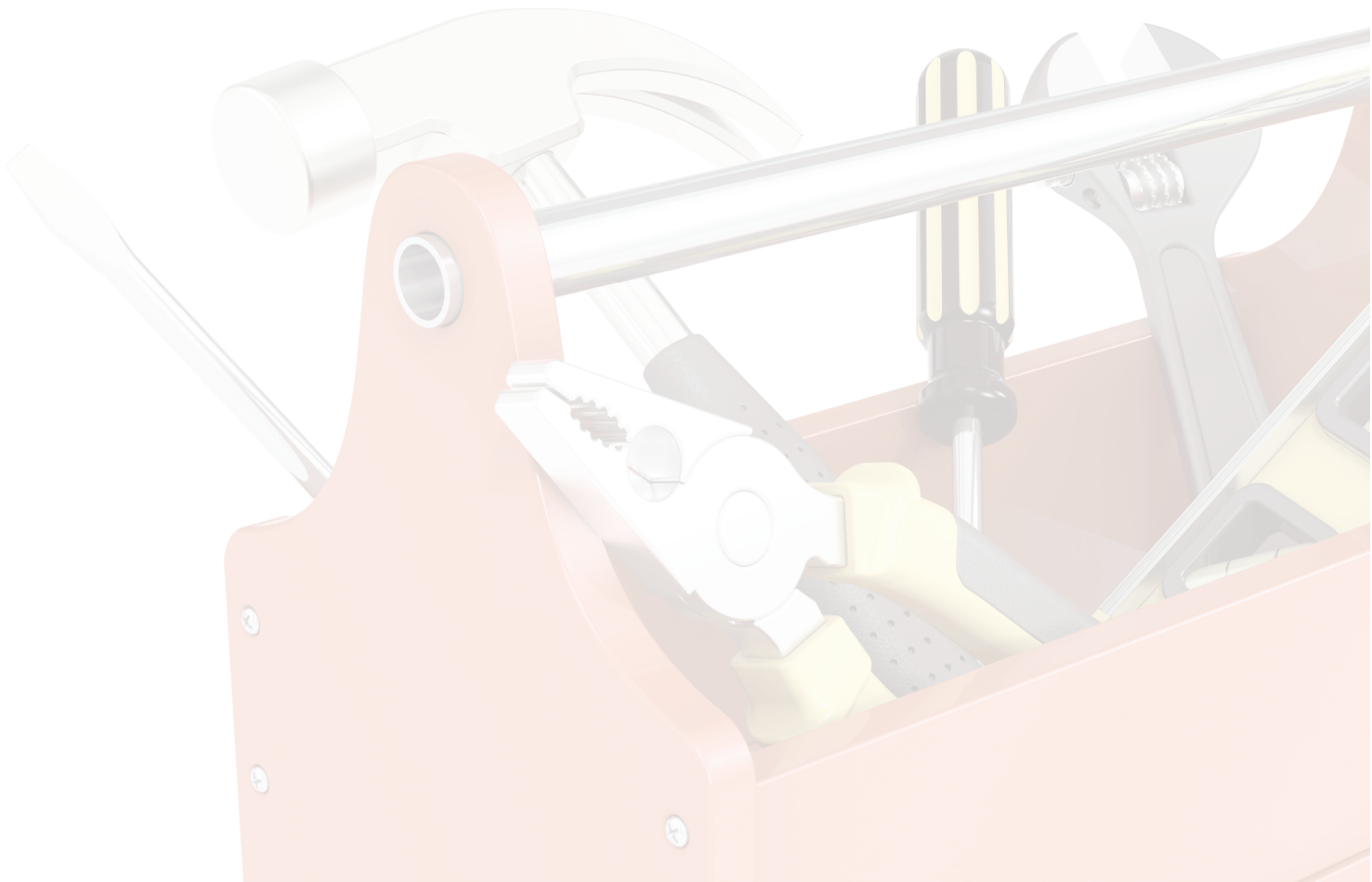


## Closing Questions

The questions in this guide should give you a good idea of whether your candidate is a good fit for your company and the particular position you are interviewing for. At this point, you should be wrapping up your interview. But first, give your candidate one final opportunity to sell you on their potential.

**Question #22:** Why should I stop searching and hire you today?

**What You'll Learn:** If there was anything left unsaid during the interview, this is the candidate's opportunity to make their final pitch. Let them sell you on their abilities, qualifications, and desire for the job.



## Finding the Right Person for the Job

Finding the perfect person that will fit the needs of your company can be difficult. If you are finding it challenging to find qualified candidates for your open positions, feel free to contact us. We are happy to discuss your hiring challenges with you.

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